

Ship Called CIA Raider Being Repainted Here

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The Rex, converted World War II Navy patrol boat that Fidel Castro claimed is one of the Central Intelligence Agency's "raiders," is being reconditioned and repainted at Jacksonville Shipyards, Inc.

The 173-foot vessel's bottom is being scraped today in preparation for painting. A shipyard official said the work to be done includes reconditioning sea valves and sea chests, miscellaneous bottom work, general cleaning and painting and inspection of a propeller drive shaft which has been causing "some vibration."

The official said the ship has suffered no damage to her propellers and the drive shaft trouble probably stems from wear rather than from an accident. The reconditioning work, described as "routine annual drydocking," began yesterday and is expected to be finished by early next week.

The vessel's captain, Alexander Brown, returned to Miami soon after she entered the shipyard. Several other members of her 15-man crew left Jacksonville yesterday for unannounced destinations.

Crew members yesterday said the vessel has been used for oceanographic and fisheries research in South Atlantic and Caribbean waters, but refused to discuss the Rex's mission further.

One crewman said members of the ship's crew have been advised that J. A. Belcher, owner of Sea Key Shipping Co. of Miami, which operates the vessel, asked that no further publicity be given the Rex.

Belcher last week denied that the craft was used in raids in Cuba and said that she was leased for a year to Collins Radio Co. of Texas.

A local resident who went aboard the Rex after its arrival here Saturday afternoon said he noticed nothing unusual about the ship except that two deck cranes designed to hold boats were empty. The vessel is equipped with a small crane suitable for launching small boats.

of the crew speak English but, except for three Americans, appear to be from Spanish speaking countries. No one volunteered any information, he said.

Brown—the ship's captain—is described as in his mid-40s and a recently retired U.S. Coast-guardman from the West Coast.

The Rex, said to have been at one time a member of the Navy's reserve fleet at Green Cove Springs, has been into the local shipyard periodically since she was sold to private interests. On her last previous visit here repairs were made to a damaged propeller.

The Rex and another vessel operated by Sea Key, the Olga

Patricia, are said to be able to enter and leave the port of Jacksonville without the usual mandatory U.S. Customs check of a foreign flag vessel and crew.

Now carrying Nicaraguan registry, the Rex is a twin-screw vessel, equipped with two 3,600-horsepower diesel engines and, while not designed for great speed, can make 20 knots.

"Jane's Fighting Ships," the authoritative reference work on military vessels throughout the world, lists the vessel as one of four ships launched between 1941 and 1944 as submarine chasers. The vessels were reclassified as patrol vessels in 1955.

Originally, the Navy had about 15 ships such as the Rex. Some were sold to commercial shipping companies, some were loaned to the Air Force and one is now being used to train naval reservists at Pearl Harbor.

The vessel has a 23-foot beam, displaces 280 tons (450 tons when loaded) and carried a crew of 80 when participating in war operations.